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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
MONDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2008

In Today's Papers

Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi Visits Ankara

Weekend papers report Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi met Saturday with President Gul in Ankara, and later with Prime Minister Erdogan in Istanbul.

The Sunday editions of Islamist-oriented Zaman and mainstream Milliyet report that Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi expressed the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government's (KRG) readiness to cooperate against the PKK, and said 'President Talabani asked me to convey a strong message in this regard.' Hashemi also said, "Turkey and Iraq have common interests and Iraq wants to develop bilateral relations in every field." Today's edition of Cumhuriyet reports that during the Hashemi-Gul meeting, Hashemi indicated the Iraqi parliament is inclined to declare the PKK 'an illegal outlaw organization' rather than declare it a 'terrorist organization.' The Iraqi parliament, according to Cumhuriyet, expects this decision will prevent the PKK from carrying out its activities through NGOs, political parties and media organizations. The paper notes the Iraqi parliament will soon adopt decision, and the KRG will follow suit; this process, at the same time, will constitute the first step towards the disarmament of the PKK. Once all these stages are implemented, the paper notes Iraqi leaders expect that an extradition process for PKK militants can be established.

CHP Changes Their Party Platform

All papers cover the CHP's weekend convention and highlight CHP leader Baykal's criticism of PM Erdogan. Baykal was quoted as saying "a considerable component of the Turkish media is under the control of the Prime Minister. There are two media groups outside PM Erdogan's control, and he has called for boycotts against the Dogan Group and has called for the closure of the Cukurova Group - these actions are worse than those of (former Argentine leader) Peron."

Among the decisions made during the convention are new, more liberal approaches to many issues. The party seeks to abolish the Higher Board of Education (YOK), lift parliamentary immunity for deputies,

encourage more freedoms for women, eliminate social pressure on women, and raise the legal marrying age for girls to 18.

Columnist Murat Yetkin of Radikal comments on the CHP's new party platform: "The CHP's party platform was approved with any debate or even any brain-storming sessions. The CHP reformed platform seems likely to return to the social democrat rhetoric instead of its current nationalistic tone."

Turkey's EU Litmus Test

Liberal daily Radikal carries a front-page story entitled "The EU Warns Turkey About 2009," and reports EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn's said he "Expects to see significant reform process in 2009" and he called the new year "a litmus test for Turkey" regarding its desire to implement the reforms necessary for accession to the EU. "Turkey wasted 2008 by not implementing necessary reforms and has put its energy toward domestic debates. I hope 2009 will be focused on reforms and steps toward a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem" Commissioner Rehn emphasized.

Editorial Opinion on U.S.-Turkey Relations Under Obama Administration'

Omer Taspinar wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Turkey is worried that Obama will be pressured by the Armenian Diaspora to use the word "genocide" when he refers to 1915 incidents. If Turkey panics and uses threatening language against the Obama Administration to prevent this word, this might back-fire. At this time, the Armenian

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apology campaign is a very good opportunity for Turkey. Moreover, it will strengthen Obama's hand against the Armenian lobby and he'll be able to say, 'let us not damage these very important developments in Turkey.' From Turkey's perspective, real patriotism means the continuation of this campaign."

Ali Aslan wrote in Islamist-oriented Zaman: "Ankara should take steps to eliminate some potential problems with the new Obama administration. Democrats are traditionally more sensitive on democracy and human rights issues, so we should act accordingly instead of complaining about it. Resolving the Kurdish issue might be a good start. Reforms on the EU process will also eliminate potential democracy and human rights issues with Washington."

President Gul's Statement on his Ancestors

All papers: Responding to CHP deputy Canan Aritman's comments regarding the ethnic background of his ancestors, President Gul issued a written statement saying that he comes from a Muslim and Turkish background.

Ahmet Hakan wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "Gul's approach, which emphasizes details about family roots, only fuels racism. If someone calls you 'Armenian,' your response should show that you don't take this as an insult. It's more appropriate to say, 'What if I am an Armenian' or 'what is wrong if I am a Jew?'

U.S. Troop Levels to Increase in Afghanistan

Media outlets report that the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen has indicated U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan could reach 20,000-30,000. Liberal Radikal reports, "Afghanistan Will Be Filled with American Forces." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports in "They Will Be Defeated like the Soviets," that Taliban Spokesman Yusuf Ahmedi responded to news of the increased troop level by promising, "We will fight the American soldiers in the same way we fought the Soviet soldiers," who, the paper notes, "withdrew after their failed ten-year occupation of Afghanistan." Mainstream Sabah reports, "It appears that this increase in Afghanistan troop levels is a step to implement the Obama administration's approach to the conflict in Afghanistan." Mainstream Milliyet reports, "This is the first time a top U.S. military official has called for such a large increase in troop levels in Afghanistan."

Pharmacists Take to the Streets

Sabah, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet and others: Today's papers report that approximately thirty thousand people met in Ankara to attend a rally arranged by the "Association of Turkish Pharmacists" and 51 Chambers of pharmacists to protest government's health policies and changes in the law envisaging payment of medical examination through pharmacists.

Turkey to Purchase Attack Helicopters from Russia
Mainstream Vatan reports that Turkey decided to buy attack helicopters from Russia after its request to buy Cobra and Super Cobra helicopters from the U.S. was turned down. Turkey will purchase 32 Mi-28 attack helicopters from Russia to use them until Turkey and Italy will co-produce A-129 helicopters.

Investigation against Author-Film Director Can Dunder
Saturday's Milliyet reported that the Ankara Prosecutor's office has initiated an investigation against Can Dunder in connection with his documentary film "Mustafa." There were three complaints against Dunder. Two of the complaints said that Dunder was damaging the image of "Ataturk", the founder of modern Turkey, by showing him as a womanizer, heavy drinker, and heavy smoker. The other complaint said that calling "Ataturk" as "Mustafa" reflected lack of respect.

Visa Applicant Asked about Ties to Fethullah Gulen
Mainstream Vatan carried a front-page story in Sunday's paper which reported that a Vatan employee from their IT department was asked

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during his visa interview by the U.S. consular officer if he/she had any intention of making contact with Fethullah Gulen during his planned travel to the U.S. According to the applicant, the visa was denied when the applicant said he/she had no intention to meet with Gulen.

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- DTP deputy Osman Ozcelik stirs tensions by giving support to Armenian genocide claims in a speech in parliament.
- Alevis in Adana rally to draw attention to their problems in the 30th anniversary of Alevi slaughter in Maras.
- CHP deputy Kemal Kilicdaroglu rejected the allegations that he would run for the post of Istanbul Mayor.
- President Gul issued a message to celebrate the start of Hanukkah.

International News

- Clashes between youth and police continue in Greece.
- U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen said that Washington could send up to 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan over the next six months.
- Lebanon assigns its first Ambassador to Syria. This is considered as the latest step toward normalizing relations.

JEFFREY